



# The Curiosity Shop



122 13 11

## Chapter 1 by Hayley

"CAN YOU PLEASE NOT DO THAT?"

The girl was startled by the shouting shopkeeper. She bowed her head and slowly drew her hand away from the glass. Inside the tank, the two youngest mermaids began to cry and hid behind their mother's fin.

The shopkeeper sighed and grabbed a small pouch from behind the counter. "You can't tap on the glass. It scares the babies." He reached in the pouch and dropped a couple of sugar cubes into the tank. The mother mermaid swam to the top of the tank and gobbled the cubes before they dissolved. "THEY'RE NOT FOR YOU, THEY'RE FOR YOUR BABIES," he shouted. He dropped two more cubes in the tank, but the mother once again devoured them instantly.

"Can they hear you?" the girl asked.

The shopkeeper removed his crooked glasses. "Don't know. Don't know if they'd understand me if they did. Curious creatures, those mermaids," he said, wiping the lenses with the bottom of his t-shirt. "But they are greedy sons of gun if you ask me." He pushed the frames back on his nose and looked at the girl. "How old are you anyway?"

"12," she said. She saw the sign on the door that stated children under 12 must be supervised when she entered the shop. Since the death of her mother, she was rarely supervised, nor

honest. "Do you have any uniforms?"

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This gave the shopkeeper a hearty chuckle. "No, you can't afford them. How about a nice goblin instead?"

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The girl glanced at the dark terrarium she had inspected when she first entered the store. Small, gray, slimy creatures chased each other, ducking in and out of an artificial cave. She was frightened by their howling laughter and the way they stared at her with their bulging, watery eyes. She shook her head fervently.

"Then what are you after? I can't have you wandering around the store all day. I'm not a babysitter," he said.

## Chapter 2 by Joakim



"I want to buy two troll eyes, small. And a bag of everglow spiders. Ohh and a pixie."

"We have no pixies! You know they are not allowed!" the shopkeeper snapped.

## Chapter 3 by Hayley



The girl hung her head. "I was really hoping for a pixie," she said.

"Yeah, well, you and a thousand evil creatures are hoping for one," he said, returning to the counter. "You think I've just got a couple pixies fluttering around in the back? I'd lose my license. And who knows what I would have bursting through my doors each day, trying to kill me for them. Pixies just aren't worth the risk."

The girl paid no attention to the old man. She was transfixed by the fountain on top of the counter. A dozen toads sat still in the shallow water, their chests heaving in unison with each breath. "What's that?" she asked.

"Pick Your Own Enchanted Toad," the shopkeeper replied. "Take it home and kiss it. Maybe it's just a toad, maybe it will turn into a prince. You never know." He boxed up a couple of troll eyes and tossed a bag of everglow spiders into a plastic sack. "That'll be \$32.99."

The girl pulled a tiny parcel wrapped in brown paper from her pocket. "I, I don't have any money," she said, unraveling the p

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"Then why are you wasting my time?" he asked. "This is a serious business."

The girl pulled a small glass vial from the paper. "But I think this should cover it. My mother told me it was as good as gold." She uncorked the vial and handed it to him.

The shopkeeper examined the shimmering contents. Bright green and yellow specks danced inside the glass. He snatched up the cork and quickly jammed it on the jar, pushing it down with all his might to seal it. "No, no, it can't be," he said, shaking his head. He grabbed the girl's wrist and shook her arm. "Where did you get this?"

"It's pixie dust," the girl explained. "My mother gave it to me before she died."

The shopkeeper ran to the front of the store and locked the door. He peered outside the window, looking up and down the street. "Do you have any idea what you've done?" he said, turning to the girl. "Quick, we have to run. Go out the back door."

The girl pointed to the window behind him. Dark, misty shadows collected in the street outside the shop, swirling and twisting into shape.

"It's too late. They're here," the shopkeeper said. The girl watched the shadows as they crept closer to the shop. The shopkeeper began mumbling a prayer.

"We have to stop them!" the girl said.

"There is no fighting them, dearie," said the shopkeeper. "They're much too powerful."

Desperate, the girl ran to the fountain and began frantically kissing each toad. She closed her eyes and wished as hard as she could, wished that they would all turn into princes.

"What are you doing? We have to hide!" the shopkeeper said.

The girl examined a toad, searching for any change in color or sudden growth. "How long does it take for them to turn into princes?" she asked.

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hide himself, the shadows spread across the storefront. They took the form of long, fluid arms and began sliding under the door and through the window seams.

The girl thought of her mother. She had died at the hands of The Mist, in a brutal and horrific way. But the girl always took comfort in how brave her mother was in her final moments. She had to make her proud. She would fight, just as her mother did.

She brightened as she had an idea. She grabbed the vial and sprinkled the pixie dust over the toads.

“WHAT ARE YOU DOING?” the shopkeeper screamed. “They will smell that a mile away! You're going to draw more of them in!”

But the toads began to turn a vibrant purple. One by one, they emitted a sharp popping sound, much like a bursting balloon. In a matter of seconds, 12 identical princes knelt before the girl.

“My fair princess,” they said in unison, “I have traveled many lands to ask for your hand in marriage.”

The girl furrowed her brow. “There's no time for your romantic hogwash. We are at war! Look!” she said, pointing at the storefront.

The shadows were churning again, this time just inside the store, as more oozed in from the street.

“Oh my,” the princes said. “Don't worry, my love, I will defend your honor.” The princes rose and formed a line in front of the girl. In a swift, synchronized gesture, they removed their glowing swords.

Chapter 4 by Eve Lusk

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The shopkeeper ducked down behind the counter, crying intensely. He too knew what it was capable of but he lacked the strength and bravery it took to intimidate it. He was weak compared to her. He began remembering little moments in the past. He thought about the darkness and how it once seeped into the eyes of his three little girls. How it took over his wife. He thought back to their last moments, the last blackened tears they all endured, practically lifeless. He became sick and spewed vomit all over the place.

The girl prepared herself for the darkness intrusion. She was ready to counter the invasion for she knew their weakness. She was still a bit shaky so she jammed her sharp teeth into her tongue, causing her to worry about the blood and focus on success. She attempted to comfort the man for a few moments but quickly instructed him to cover or blindfold his eyes as if the darkness was Medusa. She knew she was long dead but she couldn't think of another example quick enough. She didn't pay attention to whether he did so or not. She didn't have any worry or care for him.

She requested one of the princes lend her a sword and was not surprised when every one offered his. She snatched the one directly in front of her and ordered him, and was clear only him, to find as many golden feathers as he could in the store. She watched as he gathered up the eight from the cup on the highest shelf in the store with ease. She motioned him to return into their random formation.

They stood in silence awaiting the darkness when suddenly it violently struck the glass, causing it to split into a lightning bolt like shape. It began to shoot through the crack, eager to kill for it's master's happiness. Despite it's mist-like appearance, it was beyond deadly. It's stench was potent and sickening. Though called the darkness, it, in truth, was a dark shade of a sort of purple.

As they all suspected, it attacked the shopkeeper first. He was on the floor, begging mercy,

covering his tearful face. The girl didn't bother to help, she just watched. The darkness attacked it's entry but because his eyes were closed, he didn't feel the need to pry the poor man's hands away. It surrounded him with reality and sadness until he wanted to give it up. Give up his memories. Give up his own life.

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The moment he loosened his hands away the darkness made it's way through. It overtook not only his eyes as it blackened them, but also it took over his very soul. His soul, too, was blackened and forced to leak out of his eyes like tears. It was all quite gruesome.

The girl traded a prince the sword for the eight golden feathers. She tossed one feather aside, though, no one questioned her. She watched as the darkness drifted closer to her men. They held their swords straight up and she immediately commanded them to stay in that position and to not swing. They, of course, did so. The darkness was temporally paralyzed by the glowing swords and she took advantage of this.

She uncorked the dust and sprinkled it onto the seven. The feathers began to spin into the air. They bent and twisted and all types of directions. It began to look like an odd ball of quill but soon enough it took the shape of a tiny golden bird.

### Chapter 5 by Tami



The shopkeeper quickly weighed his options. Either keep the vial, which could possibly make him rich, or toss it and possibly save his life. He decided to take a chance and quickly placed the vial in his pocket, then dashed towards the back door. The mist reacted swiftly, quickening it's pace and following the shopkeeper.

The girl was shocked. She didn't want the shopkeeper to get killed though. "Hurry and follow them! Protect him!" she shouted at the princes.

"Yes, my fair maiden. Anything for you." replied a prince as they chased after the mist.

The girl followed them. When they got outside, they saw the mist surrounding the shopkeeper. What could they do?

### Chapter 6 by ShelleyM



Bound by their word to honor the request of the "fair maiden" the princes charged forward to the shopkeeper, their swords raised defiantly against the Mist. They surrounded the stunned shopkeeper, their swords at the ready, but the Mist did not fear any mortal weapon. It swarmed

around each prince, surrounding them and carrying them away into the Mist.

"No!" the girl cried. "Help them!"

But there was nothing she could do. She stood in horror as the princes began to shrink before their eyes. Like watching a rewinding film, the princes shrank in

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the murky depths of the Mist. Slowly, horribly, it turned them back into frogs. The Mist was not done, however, as the frogs grew smaller and smaller, sprouted tails and shrank into tadpoles.

Unable to stand by helplessly anymore, the girl darted forward and snatched the pixie dust out of the stunned shopkeeper's clutches. She uncorked the bottle, took a pinch of the glittering dust and threw it into the Mist.

Like a mighty wind blowing at the clouds, the Mist flowed away, allowing sunlight and air into the area again. It was, however, too late for the tadpoles. They'd reverted to frog eggs at that point and, with slight wisps of Mist clinging to them, the eggs shrank like soap bubbles until they disappeared into nothing.

The girl and the shopkeeper simply stood there, stunned for a long time before the girl punched him furiously in the side.

"OW!" he protested. "What the...!? What was that for you little brat?!"

"That was for trying to run off with my mom's pixie dust," the girl snapped back. "And for not helping those poor Prince Frogs!"

"Yeah...well...what was I supposed to do against the Mist?" grumbled the shopkeeper. "Nasty, icky, Dark stuff that could stifle the whole world if you let it! You saw what it did to those toads."

"You still shouldn't have just let the Mist have them," the girl argued. "They were only trying to help you."

The shopkeeper looked like he still wanted to argue, but thought better of it. He turned his dark eyes to the girl and looked her over carefully. "Now that you remind me," he said, curiously.

"There was nothing special about those frogs yet...then YOU waltz in here with your pixie dust nonsense...and you turn normal toads into princes...just who are you anyway, little lady?"

## Chapter 7 by Manda Brown



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Alyza continued toward the front of the store. She then grabbed her troll eyes and everglow spiders, and marched through the shattered front doors. Ignoring the shopkeepers nagging questions.

"Miss get back here! You haven't paid for that!"

"I think saving your life should be well of enough payment, don't you?" She turned and smiled mischievously at the grumpy man, as she walked down the small path leading to the town square.

Now Alyza was very clever for an eleven year old. Her mother used to tell her, "Alyza, the world may think you odd for your abnormal cleverness, but one day they will realize they need you. And you must help them for, there is no one else as clever as you."

Her mother was right to say this. So far Alyza had managed to live on her own for a year since her mother was murdered by the Mist. After her mother's death Alyza had sworn to learn as much as she could about destroying the evil Mist and it's master.

That's why she needed the trolls eyes and ever glow spiders.

## Chapter 8 by Lauren



Home was a curious thing for her, home, if that's what she could call it. She approached a large and very old looking Victorian house on the corner of 6th and Lilian Beet Street. It sat there like a very old and cranky monster, crouched and ready to pounce but caged by a very tall and sharp black iron fence. She tapped in a code into the combination box by the front, a new addition from her friend Fernando who was a tech genius and also an orphan like her. She made her way to the front and the large house yawned as she put her hand on the brass door knob, it shook it's body and stretched it's four shabby walls as if awaking from a deep sleep. It started flapping it shutters in excitement once figuring out it was her.

"Shooooosh! You'll wake up the neighbors!!!" She said, almost every other night when she came home something went awry, all because her stupid house had separation anxiety and couldn't handle it when she was out for the day. It made for good protection at least.

"Fernando?!! Feeeernando?!" Alyza yelled, wondering where her friend might be. We didn't have much time.

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short, just a few inches taller than her, and dressed like a mad scientist, this was a new look for him.

She handed the troll eyes and ever glow spiders to him. "Do you think this will work?" She asked.

"I sure hope so...", he said gazing down at the ingredients as they both made their way to his office/lab/bedroom/library for all the other orphans.

"Was Rick able to go out for more food for everyone?" She asked.

"The patrol was pretty heavy tonight, really heavy, they're everywhere Alyza. Even just hint of good magic and you're gone. I mean Alex..."

Alyza's head snapped towards him and she stopped in her steps.

"What about Alex?" She asked, her heart pounding in her ears, fear crept up her spine like ice. Not another... please not another one of us.

"He hasn't been seen for a whole 24 hours Alyza, we can only assume. And we haven't seen Rick yet, he's been gone most of the day, he went out again because he was desperate. We're all desperate, we haven't eaten in days."

"I know... I'm hungry too. Maybe if I reached out to him..." Alyza muttered under her breath.

Fernando made an angry face at her. "Forget it Alyza, you'll never get ahold of him. He's never coming back. You're an orphan like the rest of us. Abandoned, he abandoned you Alyza. You're Father's never going to help us, never."

"I... I know that... I do, I..."

"Just forget it, we have more important things at hand right now. Like how to keep us all alive for one."

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